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PHUM, MX
SUBJECT: MEXICO: ITQ,S DIFFERENT ON THE BORDER

¶1. Summary. Deputy PolCouns recently traveled to several destinations on the Mexican border with the U.S. as part of an orientation trip. The visit reaffirmed the perception that life in the north of Mexico and, in particular on the border with the U.S., is different from any other place in Mexico. On the positive side, the region is characterized by greater prosperity and a deeper sense of community with the U.S. On the downside, it suffers more acutely from the effects of narcotics trafficking and the movement of migrants from southern Mexico heading north. All segments of society signaled openness to greater cooperation with the U.S. in combating organized crime but also exhibited a genuine reluctance bordering on fear about discussing in depth perpetrators of drug trafficking. End Summary.

We're Neighbors Up Here

¶2. Deputy PolCouns visited with Mexicans from many different segments of society Q) government officials, businessmen, and NGO representatives Q) in Nuevo Laredo, Nogales, Hermosillo and Tijuana. Almost all universally talked of the sense of community they share with their U.S. neighbors to the North. Businessmen in Nuevo Laredo and local PAN politicians in Hermosillo stressed the importance they attach to regular meetings with their counterparts respectively in Texas and Arizona to tackle challenges that know no borders such as water, pollution, and crime. Many have property in the U.S. or frequently cross the border to spend vacations with friends. They don't regard Americans as their adversaries or even their competitors but, more often than not, their partners in pursuing economic opportunities or allies in looking for solutions to problems.

Drug Trafficking: The Elephant in the Living Room

¶3. Government officials, businessmen, and NGOs all share a common concern about the impact of drug trafficking and the attendant violence and crime on the region. Officials in Nuevo Laredo suggested violence had declined over the last year, thanks in no small measure to the visible presence of the military in the region. At the same time, they acknowledged underreporting could be a problem with reporters either disinclined to report on violence either out of concern about the impact on region's reputation or out of fear for their lives due to threats from traffickers. PRI insider Antonio Pena openly acknowledged that few politicians in the region weren't in some way tainted by association with drug traffickers. Amcits continue to face assaults upon crossing the border and the cases of some 24 missing Americans have not been resolved. While there was some anecdotal evidence of emergent economic activity in the wake of reduced violence, Americans were still not crossing the borders in numbers akin to 10 years ago.

¶4. Businessmen in Nuevo Laredo worried about the direct and indirect effects the drug trade was producing on life in the region. Drug traffickers would pressure businessmen and officials to help move their product. They also increasingly shake down businessmen for monthly payments if they don't want to be harassed. Asked if they register complaints with security officials, the businessmen exhibited reluctance bordering on fear. First, they don't trust officials to act effectively on information they share with them. Second, they are clearly afraid that traffickers would go after them if they discovered they were informing on their activities.

¶5. PAN politicians in Hermosillo, Sonora sought to play down the threat drug trafficking posed to their state suggesting problems were more an issue in neighboring Sinaloa, the home of the Sinaloa Cartel. They maintained that their state had not suffered the same kind of violence as other states within the region and, to date, the state government had resisted deployment of the military in significant numbers in the state. Representatives of the NGO Sonora Ciudadana had a different take. This group, headed by young, energetic, bright activists, represents a citizensQ, watch organization dedicated to reporting on government malfeasance and incompetence, particularly as it relates to budget expenditures. The group produces well-documented reports to back up their hard-hitting attacks on government officials. However, when asked about their investigation into drug cartels, the group's Director Guillermo Ruibal explicitly stated they had no intention of getting involved on this issue. The cartels killed people who threatened their interests, and he had no desire to expose his people to that kind of risk.

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¶6. Assistant to the Attorney General in Tijuana, Jorge Arturo Ramirez Lugo, was proud of government efforts to crack down on drug traffickers in the region. He drew attention to the arrest of important cartel leaders and major busts. The military had assumed a significant role in recent success. Adela Navarro, the prize-winning Director of the weekly newspaper Zeta, manifested no fear of the consequences of going after violent criminal interests. Kidnappings are occurring in greater numbers in the Tijuana area and Navarro had recently authored an investigatory report into links within the police ranks. Assailants attempted to assassinate the newspaper's editor/founder several years ago after the paper produced a report revealing the structure of the Arellano Felix Organization. However, Navarro maintained she had received no threats on her life to date. She planned to continue reporting on criminal activities and conjectured that if she were killed it probably would happen without warning.

Help Us Help You

¶7. Mexicans from practically all segments welcomed greater cooperation with the U.S. Zeta Director Navarro called for efforts to assist the police, both local and federal. She remarked that federal police stationed temporarily in Baja California are provided with meager resources. They sleep in cramped quarters and are rationed out little food and provided shoddy weapons. Coordination among the different elements of the security forces remains poor and characterized by distrust. The local forces, in particular, are riddled by corruption. When the military confiscated the weapons of the police in the process of trying to trace bullets used in the commission of a high-profile crime, assaults and murders actually went down. She urged the U.S. to do more to strengthen and reform the police at all levels. She also stressed the need for the U.S. to do more to curb the trafficking of arms into Mexico.

¶8. Jose Maria Ramos Garcia, the Director General of Academic

Studies at Tijuana's El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, expressed strong support for greater U.S. cooperation but worried that U.S. attention and assistance would wane. He also stressed the need to address the soft side of the fight against drugs. Mexico was dealing with its own drug consumption problem and needed to dedicate more resources to fight demand. He appreciated the security force's need for more resources to disrupt the cartels' activities. Ultimately, however, the largest challenge facing Mexico's police was cultural. He was familiar with the Culture of Lawfulness program and urged that the program be expanded so it could serve as a cornerstone of our efforts to transform the police into an effective crime fighting organization. He also called attention to strengthening the ability of the police to investigate crime as part of an effort to free up more time of prosecutors to prosecute and convict criminals.

Dealing with Migration

19. Migration was a common theme in meetings with both Mexicans and U.S. officials on the border. Deputy PolCouns visited U.S. Ports of Entry in Laredo, Sasabe, and Tijuana, observing first hand the challenges that face U.S. agencies and the kinds of resources the U.S. government is dedicating to protection of our border with Mexico.

-- Laredo represents the most important border crossing points for trucks with an average of 6,100 trucks crossing into the U.S. at the World Trade Bridge and Colombia Bridge daily. Presently, Laredo has 8 lanes dedicated to truck crossing at the World Trade Bridge but is looking to establish 7 more. Every truck is inspected for radioactive materials. CBP officials rely on their instincts and experts reviewing trafficking trends to select trucks for inspection (that last 1 to 1 + hours) for drugs or other contraband. CBP officials remarked that at least three firms, registered to participate in the Demonstration Trucking Project that allows Mexican drivers to deliver their loads into the interior of the U.S., have been transporting their goods across the World Trade Bridge. At the Lincoln-Juarez Bridge alone, 100 buses cross each day while 13,000 cars cross monthly. Through September, Laredo officials had seized approximately 7,000 lbs of cocaine and 35,000 lbs of marijuana.

-- Altar, a city of some 7,500 inhabitants located approximately 80 km south of the border crossing at Sasabe, serves a staging ground for Mexicans looking to cross

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illegally into the U.S. Upscale buses deliver young Mexican males from around the country in preparation for their trip north. Open markets specialize in dark clothing, hiking shoes, insect repellent, suntan lotion, backpacks, and energy bars for the hardy traveler to the U.S. Romeo Monteverde Estrella, the President of the Municipal Council in Altar, a former illegal migrant to the U.S. himself, told Deputy PolCouns that the number of hopeful migrants to the U.S. had not declined in recent years, maintaining his city continued to produce as much trash as neighboring towns twice the size of Altar. He conveyed sensitivity about U.S. concerns regarding the movement of potential terrorists across the border. He recalled the case of several Iraqis apprehended locally whom he said had been sentenced to several years in jail. An elderly man collects 30 pesos (approximately \$2.75) from each vehicle heading north for the 80 km trip on an unpaved road from Altar to the border on the border. An army outpost located some 12 km from the border stops vans making the trip, ostensibly looking for drugs, before travelers continue north for the last segment.

-- The border crossing at Sasabe is dominated by construction of the Q&wallQ8 which consists of solid 18-20 ft long steel poles that extend another 5-6 ft underground and weigh 4,000-5,000 lbs each. Presently, the wall extends some 2 +

miles west and 4 + miles east of the port of entry. CBP officials report illegal crossings in the vicinity of the wall are down dramatically, attributing the reduction directly to the wall.

-- Tijuana receives the greatest number of visitors of any U.S. POE. CBP officials man 24 vehicle primary lanes at the principal port (San Ysidro) and another 13 at the Otay Mesa crossing. At San Ysidro, CBP processes approximately 110,000 visitors daily crossing either in some 50,000 cars or by foot. Otay Mesa processes approximately 15,000 cars and 9,000 pedestrians. CBP is awaiting construction of a new \$600 million port to be completed in 2014 that would have a total of 58 stacked booths in 29 lanes. The current POE has reserved a room for Mexican Consular officials to use in meeting with any minors who are detained while attempting to cross the border. ICE officials reported greater success in working more closely with Mexican officials to recover vehicles and disrupt drug operations. CBP officials stressed that they would like to see a CBP liaison officer assigned to Consulate in Tijuana facilitate informational exchange on operations and developments. Rafael Alarcon, the Director of the Social Studies Department at Tijuana's Colegio de la Frontera Norte and an expert on Mexican migration to the U.S., believed tough U.S. immigration policies were impacting the numbers of Mexicans making the sojourn north. He suggested these policies would contribute to a Q& migration of the fittest, Q8 with fewer women and children seeking to make the trip but young men continuing to take their chances.

110. Comment. Mexicans living on the border with the U.S. recognize that their relative prosperity flows in large measure from their extensive economic ties with the U.S. They embrace opportunities to deepen that relationship through cooperation on economic projects and on efforts to address common challenges. They are also acutely sensitive to the threat drug trafficking poses to their way of life. Drug-related violence along the border remains high as is concern about the influence organized crime brings to bear upon political institutions and the local businessmen. Most strongly support greater cooperation with the U.S. in combating organized crime but call for particular attention to strengthening local and federal police forces. They tolerate the increased delays that come with stricter border controls but worry about the growing number of migrants who take up residence in their States when they are turned back from the U.S. Strengthening the relationship that exists amongst the communities on both sides of the border should only help our countries better meet the challenges we share.
End Comment.

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